



ISSN: 0976-3376

Available Online at <http://www.journalajst.com>

ASIAN JOURNAL OF  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Asian Journal of Science and Technology  
Vol. 10, Issue, 02, pp.9420-9424, February, 2019

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN PRESENT ISLAMIC SOCIETY

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#### ARTICLE INFO

##### Article History:

Received 24<sup>th</sup> November, 2018  
Received in revised form  
17<sup>th</sup> December, 2018  
Accepted 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2019  
Published online 28<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

##### Key words:

Women empowerment,  
Islamic society, Present world,  
Challenge, Opportunity.

#### ABSTRACT

Women Empowerment becomes an important fact in the contemporary world. Now in present world there is a western society (First World) and also a World which called as third world (includes countries of Indian subcontinent, countries of middle east, and also African countries), women status is one of the important thing for both this world. Empowerment means moving from enforced powerlessness to a position of power through ensuring education, knowledge, skills. Evaluation of awareness among women is one of the most valuable features. Therefore, at all the forums including United Nation Organization, women rights and issues regarding women empowerment are being discussed about it. All the countries have been forced to draw out their women from parochial culture and trying to utilize as a skilled human resource. It is a potent description in which roles assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystic and aesthetic, and excluded from the practical and political realms. The basic objective is to highlight women empowerment in Muslim Society and its practical implementation was observed in all the socio-economic and political field. Islam gives credence to women, certifying towards them respect, honour, dignity and equality. Many women have taken leaps and strides in the developed world where we see Muslim women who have obtained an education, deliberate their own future and make choices which can enhance and their quality of life. Yet in stark contrast in the developing world, many women have not had this opportunity. Today we face a challenging situation where we have the teachings as our guidance yet not all women have the circumstance and opportunity to rise up and flourish as individuals.

Citation: Md Sadidul Alam. 2019. "Women empowerment in present Islamic society", *Asian Journal of Science and Technology*, 10, (02), 9420-9424.

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#### INTRODUCTION

This article emphasizes on women empowerment issues in Islamic society. For understanding women empowerment and its practices in we briefly discuss the western leader United States of America, Arab World, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the world largest democracy India. It also makes a learned discussion of the vital role played by women as mother. Islam gives a profound regard and immense importance for women. Although, several critics are existed here to pert the women situation in Islam but in general, it has sympathetic relationship with Islamic society as a reverence reconciling women empowerment in as well as other societies. As empowerment means increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals and communities to deliver an authority or permission, women empowerment means to break up the so called limitation on freedom of expression, education, mobility, financial independence, rights and duties, etc., imposed by the society. According to UNIFEM (United Nations Development Fund for Women), the basic principle of women empowerment is equality.

Equality in a business, workplace and market place or in a community is a pre-requisite for any society regarding empowering women.

**Oppressed, inferior, and unequal** – for many people, these are the first words that come to mind when thinking about women in Islam. These stereotypes confuse Islam with cultural practices and fail to recognize that Islam has empowered women with the most progressive rights since the 7<sup>th</sup> century. In Islam, women are not inferior or unequal to men. This we want to presents the actual teachings of Islam regarding the rights, roles, and responsibilities of women, with a special focus on gender equality in Islam.

At a time when female children were buried alive in Arabian women were considered transferable property, Islam honored women in society by elevating them and protecting them with unprecedented rights. Islam gave women the right to education, to marry someone of their choice, to retain their identity after marriage, to divorce, to work, to own and sell property, to seek protection by the law, to vote, and to participate in civic and political engagement. In 610 C.E., Allah began to reveal the message of Islam to Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him (pbuh), in Mecca. Muhammad

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(pbuh) called people towards the belief in one Allah and encouraged them to be just and merciful to one another. In reforming the pagan Arab society, he particularly transformed their mindset regarding the treatment of women. Islam abolished the practice of killing female children and raised the stature of women in society to one of dignity, esteem, and privilege. Allah devotes an entire chapter of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, to women. In addition, Allah directly addresses women repeatedly throughout the Quran. Islam proclaims that all human beings, men and women, are born in a pure state. The goal of every Muslim is to preserve this purity by shunning evil tendencies and beautifying their inner being with virtuous traits. Islam further confirms that both men and women are equal in the sight of Allah. In the Quran, Allah declares, "...Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you..." (49:13) At another place in the Quran, Allah clearly states that all humans are equal: "To whoever, male or female, does good deeds and has faith, We shall give a good life and reward them according to the best of their actions." (16:97) While Islam clearly establishes that men and women are equal, it does recognize that they are not identical. Allah created men and women with unique physiological and psychological attributes. In Islam, these differences are embraced as vital components to a healthy family and community structure with each individual contributing their own distinctive talents to society.

Hence, Allah's rules apply to both genders, but in diverse ways. For example, Allah commanded women to cover certain parts of their body, including their hair, to preserve their modesty. Men are also required to cover parts of their body out of modesty, but not in the same way as women. Therefore, Allah commanded both men and women to be modest; yet, the manner in which they observe it is different. Similarly, the rights, roles, and responsibilities of women are evenly balanced with those of men but are not necessarily the same. As Islam has granted individual identities to men and women, a constant comparison between the two is futile. Each plays a unique role to mutually uphold social morality and societal balance. The prevailing idea of a woman's place in Islam is that women are deprived of freedom and equality. This is the result of either ignorance about Islam or the biased propaganda of anti-Islamic ideology and a prejudiced media. The fact is just the opposite. It is not out of place here to examine the place given to women in some of the so-called glorious civilizations prior to Islam. For instance, in Greek mythology a woman, Pandora, was considered to be the source of all evil. In the name of art, the Greeks depicted women in such a way that promoted unbridled sex. In the second civilization, the Roman one, their philosopher, Seneca, reprimanded Romans about the degenerating family system. A sport named "Floralia" promoted licentious atmosphere. When it came to Christianity, Chrysostom says: "Woman is an unavoidable evil, a delicious calamity and an attractive trouble." Aristotle declared: "The female state is a deformity."

A Roman Catholic, Aquinas, believed: "A female is a misbegotten male." Nietzsche, the German philosopher, opines: "Woman is the source of folly, unreason." In modern Europe, women were not given equal rights and the situation led to feminist movements that have been constantly struggling for equal rights for women. Before the advent of Islam in Arabia, the position of the fair sex was appalling. Girls were sometimes killed as soon as they were born. The

infant girls were buried alive. A man could marry and abandon or divorce a woman any number of times. The number of wives was unlimited. Islam emancipated woman in all respects. Provisions for empowerment of women in the Islamic system of life:

**Freedom:** Girls are as free to receive education as boys are. "It is obligatory for every man and woman to receive education." Education and training in etiquette is the best gift of parents to children. A girl cannot be married off to anybody without her consent. As man has liberty to divorce; a woman is also allowed to take "khula" (divorce) if she dislikes her husband who is cruel, unjust or impotent. A widow or a divorcee is allowed to re-marry if she wishes. In Islam it is preferred that women remain at home to look after the family and train children. Still if no male guardian lives with her or if he is ill or his income is insufficient, she may go out to earn but in hijab. During the time of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), there were women traders and there were instances when women participated in wars to supply water or to nurse the wounded. At present thousands of Muslim women in hijab work in hospitals, banks, schools, colleges and many other congenial working places.

**Equality:** There is no gender disparity in Islam. "And whoever does righteous good deeds male or female and is a true believer in the Oneness of Allah, such will enter Paradise and not the least injustice, even to the size of a Naqira (speck on the back of a date-stone), will be done to them." (Qur'an, 4:124) Man is the head of the family. Critics of Islam quote this out of context. This position of man is to safeguard and strengthen the institution of the family. It is the responsibility of man to provide food, shelter and other needs to all family members. Women are equal to men in all civil and criminal acts of judiciary.

**Security:** The security of woman in Islam is very important. She is not inferior to a male. "The person to whom a daughter is born and he does not ... mete out preferential treatment to boys, Allah will reward him with heaven." (Hadith i.e. saying of the Prophet). Parents are motivated to nurture girls. The responsibility to provide bread and meat to girls and women lies with the male guardian. "You should feed her when you eat, and clothe her when you yourself put on clothes. And in case of temporary boycott due to strained relations, it should be limited to the four walls of your house." (Hadith). When she travels a long distance, a male guardian must accompany her to facilitate her journey. Islam restricted the number of wives to four. Divorce, though permissible, is not encouraged.

**Dignity:** In contrast to the Christian idea that woman is the source of evil and she opened the door to Satan, Islam believes that Satan simultaneously seduced both Adam and Eve. The mother's place is higher than the father's. Heaven lies under the mother's feet. Woman is the ruler/queen of her husband's establishment. The veil is only a protective device to shield her from mischievous staring eyes. When women are asked to wear veil, men are ordered not to stare at women. "And tell the believing women to reduce (some) of their vision." (The Qur'an: 24:31)

**Politics and Social Services:** Among the early Muslims, women were active participants in the cohesive functioning of the society. Women expressed their opinions freely and their advice was actively sought. Women nursed the wounded

during battles, and some even participated on the battlefield. Women traded openly in the marketplace, so much so that the second caliph, Umar, appointed a woman, Shaffabint Abdullah, as the supervisor of the bazaar. In Islamic history, women participated in government, public affairs, lawmaking, scholarship, and teaching. To continue to uphold this tradition, women are encouraged to actively participate in improving, serving, and leading the different aspects of the community.

**Inheritance:** Before Islam, women all across the globe were deprived of inheritance and were themselves considered property to be inherited by men. Islam gave women the right to own property and inherit from relatives, which was a revolutionary concept in the seventh century. Whether a woman is a wife, mother, sister, or daughter, she receives a certain share of her deceased relative's property. This share depends on her degree of relationship to the deceased and the number of heirs. While many societies around the world denied women inheritance, Islam assured women this right, illustrating the universal justice of Islam's divine law.

**Financial Responsibilities:** In Islam, women are not obligated to earn or spend any money on housing, food, or general expenses. If a woman is married, her husband must fully support her financially and if she's not married, that responsibility belongs to her closest male relative (father, brother, uncle, etc). She also has the right to work and spend the money she earns as she wishes. She has no obligation to share her money with her husband or any other family members, although she may choose to do so out of good will. For instance, Khadija, the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), was one of the most successful businesswomen of Mecca, and she freely spent from her wealth to support her husband and the cause of Islam. "For men is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, and for women is a share of what the parents and close relatives leave, be it little or much — a legal share." (Qur'an, 4:7). Thus Islam gives dignity, respect, protection, and an appropriate place to women. But status of women in muslim society of present world is not good. Half of the total population of muslim society is women whose socio economic condition is not so good. The status of women in muslim society remained comparatively inferior to that of men. Though women are working here in educational institution, multinational company, medical, Bank and other financial institutions, Garments and other factories, police even in some exceptional areas but still now in many cases they are neglected, tortured and dominated by male society. Without ensuring empowerment of women it is not possible to develop the overall socio economic and political condition of muslim society. Islam gives more importance to show a profound respect for women. Women in Islam are recognized as equal partner in the procreation of humankind. Allah says in the Holy Quran: "And (as for) the believers, both men and women — they are friends and protectors of one another: they [all] enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong, and are constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues, and pay heed unto God and His Messenger." (At-Taubah 9:71) From this verse it can be said that men and women are equal in the sight of their creator. The only way one can be better than other is by being more righteous. Islam empowered women by ensuring that their rights are preserved and counseling that they are given equitable opportunities to

succeed is essential to contain the Quranic vision, "O you who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in upholding justice". Strengthening all women in the muslim society is a long-term process, but here are some simple ways to begin:

### **Recognize and validate traditional women's roles**

Stay-at-home mother. Devoted wife. Doting daughter. These are all roles that more traditional Muslims, in particular, laud as the highest station for women. Yet, they are rarely acknowledged for the tremendous benefits they bring to Muslim families, and by extension, Muslim communities. Starting with the next community event, have male speakers acknowledge and publicly thank these women in their lives. It could be the mother who helped a young man memorize the Quran; the wife of the Imam, who helped him hash out ideas and shape his speech through discussions and help with research; the daughter of a fundraiser, who helped him develop the pitch he needed to raise the funds for a project. All of these women need to be recognized publicly for the indispensable help they offered. It's a small gesture, but one that will make the community's men and boys realize that "women's work" in the traditional sense is enormously important. It will also give a much-needed boost to sisters who often feel their efforts are taken for granted or minimized.

### **Address domestic violence and family abuse head on**

Violence in the family is the way women have long been held back and disempowered. This type of abuse which Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, hated, must be addressed and tackled urgently in all Muslim communities. Even one case is too many. For ideas on how to work on this issue, please check out our Domestic Violence page.

### **Acknowledge and recognize women volunteers, specifically**

Women are the backbone of volunteerism in the Muslim community in so many ways. You will usually not encounter them as high profile speakers and fundraisers, but nine times out of ten, you'll find them responsible for taking care of the food at events. And for all the importance given to speakers and fundraisers at dinners, if the food arrangements aren't well-organized, the whole evening can be ruined. Women are often the first to volunteer their time to teach at Islamic weekend schools. This is especially with children in younger grades, who require more patience and are frankly, not as fun to teach as older kids who can better understand more complex aspects of Islam. These are just two examples, but they simply reflect the kind of "grunge work" most men choose to shun for more "prestigious" volunteerism. Acknowledge the sister volunteers of the community with a special event and hand out awards; print their names with a note of thanks in the community newsletter and publish them on your mosque or Islamic center's website. Be creative. There are many more ways to offer thanks. The reward of doing this will be renewed enthusiasm on their part and encouragement for the young women in the community to serve in the future as well. For the men, it will instill a recognition of women's oft-neglected contributions.

### **Teach Women's Studies....Islamic style**

Starting next year, offer classes about Women's Studies and Women's History in your Islamic weekend school, Halaqas

and full-time Islamic schools. These need to go way beyond the usual brief chapters discussed about Maryam, Asiya, Fatima, Khadija and Aisha (may Allah be pleased with them all). The courses need to discuss the impact these five fundamental women have had on the development of Islam and the Muslim community as a whole, not just the women. Companions of the Prophet by Abdul Wahid Hamid, offers a great compilation of lesser known women among the first generation of Muslims. In addition, these classes need to highlight the many, many Muslim women throughout history whose contributions have long been ignored, but who have sacrificed their wealth, skills, talents and lives for Islam. Some more recent examples from within the American Muslim community include pioneers Lois LamyFaruqi, Maryam Funches and ShareefaAlkhateeb.

### **Incorporate stories of Muslim women in Friday Khutbas**

Friday sermons are an indispensable tool for mass Islamic education. They offer the best platform to address the community as a whole on not just women's rights, but generally, how women are the fabric of a solid Muslim community. Imams and Khateeb need to weave stories of the struggles and sacrifices of Muslim women into their sermons, instead of just devoting one Khutba every few years on the topic of "the status of women in Islam". For instance, a Khutba on the need to be generous in establishing the Muslim community can mention examples of the tremendous amount of wealth Khadija devoted to the cause; a Khutba on knowledge should not omit the incredible scholarship of Aisha. May Allah be pleased with both of them.

### **Make sure sisters are represented in the mosque, Islamic center or organization's leadership**

This means going beyond establishing a "women's committee" at the Masjid that simply deals with "women's issues". Women must be included on critical decision-making bodies because their input offers the kind of Shura (consultation) that directly affects half of the Muslim community and many times, all of it. For example, if your mosque or center is expanding or renovating, few brothers will understand the need for including a diaper changing station in a bathroom. A sister is more likely to bring this up. And as more daddies are involved in child care nowadays, this is no doubt an idea fathers visiting mosques would also welcome. At the time of Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him, women freely discussed issues that concerned them with him and later, with other community leaders. They did this inside and outside the mosque. Whatever method they chose, be it public or private, they let their voices be heard. Let the Muslim women in your community also be able to voice their critical input.

### **Drop unIslamic double standards in word and action**

While cultural double standards when it comes to men and women's behavior have long existed in the Muslim community, this is hardly an Islamic practice. If brother X is known to be dating his fourth girlfriend, his behavior should not be ignored or brushed off with the "boys will be boys" refrain so common in the community. Similarly, if sister Y is seen talking to a boy, she should not be accused of being "loose" or worse. This is where Islamic standards of dealing with the opposite sex need to be made known to the entire

community, through Khutbas, as well as gently and wisely correcting those who practice cultural double standards anathema to Islam.

### **Give them the info they need to seek knowledge**

The phrase "knowledge is power" has become a tired cliché but it's a truism that continues to affect so many Muslim women. To kick off the knowledge = empowerment theme in your community, start off by compiling a comprehensive list of local classes, workshops, seminars, etc. Make this list available not only via email, on your blog or on a listserv, but also, the old-fashioned way: by putting fliers in the mosque's women's section. That way, women have the tools at their fingertips on or offline to begin their journey to empowerment. Also make sure that the information is translated into the language most used amongst the women. At present world the issues of empowering women becoming more concerning matter for everyone. In Islamic society we can see progress in empowerment of women but still there are lots of aspects it needs to improvise to derive a successful result from women empowerment. And this improvisation can be done under the guideline of Quran and Sunnah to ensure safety, dignity, and self-respect of women at any place inside or outside of the house wherever she wishes to work. Women empowerment does not mean only giving power in professional life but also empowering a girl in her family, in her educational institutions, in her conjugal life, and in any other aspects of a human life. It is also established through this article that Islam is not against women empowerment rather it has covered all the aspects of human life to ensure women empowerment in a proper manner. So to get a better and positive result from women empowerment in every sector Islamic society should follow the instructions of Quran and observe the examples established through the life of our Prophet Muhammad (Pbuh)

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